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AUTHOR Shapiro, Phyllis; And Others
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ABSTRACT

On the assumption that the fundamental purpose of teacher supervision is the improvement of the teaching/learning process, supervision is viewed as a tool which can improve instruction if it is based on cooperative mechanisms involving all of the interested parties. From a background of both empirical work and conceptual analysis, a framework is presented for a multi-step process for teacher superision, a process which includes an experimental observation instrument based on Festinger's theory of cognitive dissonance. Each phase of the program is discussed with particular stress on the active role of the teacher in the inservice process. (Six references are listed.) (Author)

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Supervision - A New Approach to In-Service Teacher Education

Phyllis Shapiro
Phyllis Cohen
Nancy Wright
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Introduction

Both teacher evaluation and professional development have had their own natural history within the schools. Traditionally, teacher evaluation has been primarily summative in nature -- some overall judgment of effectiveness at a given point in time. It is only more recently that formative approaches to teacher evaluation (approaches within which evaluative data are seen as feedback for the purpose of improved performance) have been developed. Similarly, professional development has traditionally been thought of in terms of programs in continuing professional education that could be delivered to practising teachers. It has only gradually become apparent to us that classroom teachers must be as much the subjects as the objects of program delivery if such programs in professional development are to be of any real benefit and effect.

It seems, therefore, that we presently have an opportunity to bring these two strands of development together -- that is the emphasis on formative evaluation and the focus on teachers' involvement in their own professional development -- in order to explore the possibilities of teacher evaluation as a technique of in-service education or professional development. The present project represents one effort in this area.

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The Project, focussing on the use of supervision and teacher evaluation as a tool for in-service education, is based on the general assumption that the purpose of teacher supervision is the improvement of the teaching/learning process. Thus, supervision is seen as a means to improve instruction, and further, a means whose effectiveness is based, as suggested earlier, on the continuing involvement in the process of both teachers and their supervisors. More specifically, our program puts forward a framework for improving in-service teacher education and, therefore, classroom teaching and learning, through the use of a special and systematic performance measure and, more importantly, a multi-step developmental process referred to by Cogan as the Cyclé of Supervision[1].

The Performance Measure

Because climate has a pervasive influence on the potential to learn in the classroom, teaching behaviour as it affects classroom climate was selected as the focus of interest. Research on classroom climate indicates that the teacher is responsible for setting the atmosphere of the classroom, an important dimension which can promote or inhibit learning outcomes. Accepting the importance of classroom climate, a performance measure in the form of an observation instrument designed to measure classroom climate, the Tuckman Form[2], was selected. By measuring classroom climate which is produced largely by the teacher's classroom behaviour, the observation instrument indirectly measures teacher behaviour itself.

The Form itself is a rating scale consisting of twenty-eight pairs of bi-polar adjectives (e.g., cold/warm; patient/impatient; accepting/critical; disorganized/organized) presented in a semantic differential rating form, a format which is consistent with Kelly's[3] approach to constructing reality and, of course, with Osgood, Suci, And Tannenbaum's[4] assertation that items which can be shown to cluster together have the same general meaning for people. Designed to be completed by both teachers and supervisors, the Tuckman Form proved, in the event, to be easy to understand, requiring little time either to learn how to use or to integrate its results for feedback purposes. Factor analyses of the rating data revealed four clusters of classroom climate and teaching behaviour: creativity, dynamism, organized demeanor, and warmth or acceptance. Finally, the Tuckman data indicated high degrees of both reliability and validity. Internal reliability coefficients ranged from .55 to .84 and inter-rate coefficients from .65 to .90[5]. For the purposes of this particular study, the Form was modified through a refining of some of the definitions (although not the selection) of the twenty-eight adjective pairs.

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The Cycle of Supervision

The Cycle of Supervision utilized in this study is adapted from Cogan's design and stresses a multi-step process crucial to all formative or developmental approaches. In this particular case, the cycle consisted of six phases.

Phase I focussed on developing the teacher-supervisor relationship. Working within a suburban elementary school just outside the metropolitan Toronto area, meetings were set up with the school principal and six volunteer teachers from that particular school. The teacher sample represented the grade levels Kindergarten through Grade Eight and included both general classroom teachers and some specialists in French, English as a Second Language, and Special Education. At these initial meetings, the plans of the Project were outlined. More specifically, it was explained that the Modified Tuckman Form would be completed by both the classroom teacher and the principal/supervisor in terms of the way in which each would prefer to see the teacher behave in the classroom. Subsequently the form would be completed by the principal/supervisor in terms of actual classroom behaviour. The differences between the two preferred views as well as between those and the classroom behaviour actually observed would form the basis for consideration -- by both supervisor and teacher -- of possible plans for improvement.

At these same meetings, some time was devoted to the rationale for this approach, arising as it does from Festinger's theory of cognitive dissonance[6]. According to Festinger, dissonance is a motivating force for its own reduction. When a person feels dissonant, there is a motivation to reduce the dissonance. In this study, as outlined above, the observation form was filled out by the classroom teacher expressing desired teaching behaviour and classroom climate and by the supervisor in the first instance expressing preferred teaching behaviour and in the second instance assessing actual teaching behaviour and classroom climate. The discrepancy between the various views was assumed to create an observed dissonance which could become both the focus of the supervisory process and the motivation -- in the teacher -- for positive change.

Phase II of the Project consisted simply in planning with the individual teachers for their own completion of the Form and for the visits of the principal/supervisor to observe and characterize actual classroom performance.

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Phase III consisted of the actual completion of the Forms by both teacher and supervisor. The teacher completed the Form at his/her own convenience. The supervisor did similarly relative to the description of "preferred" behaviour and climate. With regard, however, to the assessment of actual classroom performance, the supervisor observed each of the participating teachers three times: once simply for general observation and twice for the completion of the Modified Tuckman Form.

Phase IV focussed on the analysis of the data from the completed Tuckman Forms. Scoring was completed by the Project staff who calculated the indices of creativity, dynamism, organized demeanor, and warmth/acceptance for each teacher as seen by the teacher him- or herself and as seen by the supervisor, using in the latter case the average of the ratings from the two last classroom observations.

Phase V was the feedback phase. The Project staff prepared a graph displaying the differences between the supervisor's and the teacher's preferred behaviour as well as the difference between these two preferred models and that which resulted from the supervisor's actual observations. These were forwarded to the supervisor for sharing with the individual classroom teachers along with a prose report focussing on the highlights of the data comparisons and providing suggestions for changes in teaching behaviour that might bring the teacher's observed behaviour closer to the preferred 'mode'.

In the full Cycle of Supervision, this Phase would have been followed by a sixth and final phase dealing with various follow-up activities, and, of course, post testing, planning to re-enter the Cycle at Phase I at some future time. This Phase was not part of the present Project. We did, however, solicit feedback from the Principal who reported that the data yielded were extremely helpful in preparing her own evaluation reports to the central Board office and especially valuable in identifying areas of specific strength and weakness for individual teachers. Moreover, a large amount of significant positive feedback was received with regard to the involvement of the teachers in the process and the value of this involvement not only in remedial plans for the future but also in the climate for continuing supervision at the School.

This particular aspect of this initial feedback is considered to be of considerable value, for any approach to formative supervision and evaluation must not only provide information on areas and behaviours "ripe" for development but also create a context of meaningful rapport between the supervisor and the teachers under his or her supervision.

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It seems to us that following this initial positive experience with the process, further development in two directions is warranted: (1) the use of the approach as between teachers in a form of peer evaluation rather than in a supervisory setting; and (2) the development of specialized materials to assist in the changing of teacher behaviours in the areas considered by the Modified Tuckman Form.

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Footnotes

1. Cogan, M.L., Clinical Supervision, Boston; Houghton Mifflin Co., 1973.

2. Tuckman, B.W. "New Instrument: The Tuckman Teacher Feedback Form." Journal of Educational Measurement, 1973, 13, 233-237.

3. Kelly, G.A. The Psychology of Personal Constructs, New York: Norton 1955.

4. Osgood, C.E., Suci, G.J., Tannenbaum, P.H. The Measurement of Meaning. Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 1957.

5. Tuckman, B.W., Steber, J.M., Hyman, R.T. "Judging the Effectiveness of Teaching Styles: The Perceptions of Principals", Educational Administration Quarterly. Vol. 15, No. 1 (Winter, 1979): 104-115.

6. Festinger, L. Theory of Cognitive Dissonance, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1968.

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